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# SHIVA RATRI CELEBRATIONS

(Festival of the marriage of Lord Shiva and Paravati)

माता पितरौ वन्दे पार्वती परमेश्वरौ

(We bow to Paravati and the Supreme Lord Shiva, Mother and Father of all creation.)

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# SHIVA RATRI CELEBRATIONS

**Preamble :-** Shiva Ratri festival is celebrated by the Kashmiri Pandits as an anniversary of the marriage of Lord Shiva and Goddess Paravati. The story of their marriage is well known among the Pandits. On the night of the 13th day of the dark fortnight of the month of Phalgun, Lord Shiva and Paravati are worshipped in every Pandit's home. The deities are honoured and offered feasts like bridegroom and bride invited, as it were, by the parents of the bride. In every home festivities are enjoyed in honour of the visit of the divine guests. The custom has come down to us from time immemorial. The worship of Shiva on Shiva-Ratri is mentioned as one of the ancient festivals in Nilamata Purana, the earliest extant work in Kashmir, supposed by Dr. Buhler to be the record of the time not older than the sixth or seventh century A. D. According to this work, the tradition had come down from a remote age.

**Marriage of Shiva and Paravati :-** The story of the marriage of Lord Shiva and Paravati is narrated in the Ramayana of Tulsidasa (Ramacharita-manasa) (Kanda I). In the transcendental view, Lord Shiva, the supreme God, and His divine consort Bhawani (Uma, Paravati) are eternally united in wedlock never to part. Shiva without Shakti (power) will be left impotent and unable to act. Shakti is the eternal instrument of Shiva for the work of creation etc. In fact Shakti, the divine mother, is all in all. She is the cosmic energy or the constituent power that transforms itself into this universe comprising animate and inanimate objects. Shiva is the Ultimate Reality, the background of this universe, that which animates this all creation. In the Kashmir Shaiva philosophy, the Ultimate Reality is conceived as Universal Consciousness and Universal Energy. It is owing to these two aspects of

the Ultimate Reality that the universe consists of mind and matter, subjects and objects. In the philosophical language, the Ultimate Reality is Prakasha and Vimarsha. Prakasha means what manifests the reality or what exists; Vimarsha means the manifested reality or the existence of what exists and what makes us aware of that These are the only two aspects of one and the same being and that being is Parama Shiva, the Ultimate Reality. The two aspects are conceived for the devotees as Shiva and Shakti who are never apart from one another. Our mythology, however, severes Shakti from shiva for a 'brief' period and reunites them afterwards. Shakti - Uma known also Sati, the divine consort of Shiva, burns herself in Daksha's sacrificial fire. She is reborn as Paravati, daughter of himalaya, and is married again with Lord Shiva. How it happened is given in brief as follows :-

Once upon a time Lord Shiva went to the abode of the sage Agastya and with him went Uma his eternal divine consort. The saint honoured them and recited the story of Shree Rama which greatly delighted shiva. He enjoyed hearing and telling the Lord Rama's praise. The divine guests remained at Agastya's place for some days, and them they returned to their home. Shiva, while going with his wife, on his way home, thrilled often with emotion. Sati could discern her Lord's deep delight and her heart was filled with doubt and concern. She thought:

"Great Shiva, with praise universal as Lord,
By gods and by men and by sages adored,
To human prince (Rama) has he this reverence shown,
And called him Supreme, True Bliss, Saviour, Alone...!
The Supreme One, unlimited, unborn, unmoved,
Partless, effortless, unrelated..., Oh how
In man's form is he incarnated ?
"When Vishnu for sake of the gods takes man's guise,
He still is, like Shiva all knowing all wise...
How comes he an ignorant, wife-seeking roamer ?" §

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§ संकरु जगतवंद्य जगदीसा। सुर नर मुनि सब नावहिं सीसा ॥
तिन्ह नृपसुतहि कीन्ह परनामा। कहि सच्चिदानंद परधामा ॥
बिष्नु जो सुरहित नर तनुधारी, सोउ सर्बज्ञ जथा त्रिपुरारी।
खोजै सो कि अज्ञ इव नारी, ज्ञानधाम श्रीपति असुरारी।

Such were the doubtings that troubled her mind. She did not express her doubt or put any question to her Lord. But Shiva knew everything that was in Sati's mind. He said:

"You have the nature of woman, my dear ;
Just listen and cast from your mind doubt and fear." *

Shiva praised Rama, the divine Raghubir, as his own lord and the lord of all creatures, he who is pervading all things. But it seemed that Shiva could make no impression on her. Then he said again with a smile,

"Since still you are harb'ring such doubts in your breast,
Go you, for yourself put my words to the test ;" †

So Sati came over to the spot for the purpose as suggested by Lord Shiva. Shiva stayed there deeply reflecting "She will come to some harm", and began to meditate upon his Lord praising his dear name - Rama. While Sati drew near to Rama (who was then wandering in the forests in search of Sita who was robbed away by Ravana the demon), she assumed the form of Sita standing right in the pathway and tried to deceive Rama. Lakshmana saw her first in disguise and then the divine Lord Rama noted all her deceiving. Rama, however, greeted her, joining his hands in respect. Then he addressed her with smiles and in soft kindly tone :

'He asked her, "And where's your Lord, Shiva the good?
And why are you wandering alone in this wood ?" ‡

Thus on hearing his words, she stood deeply bashful and ashamed of her doing. She set out again to where Shiva was waiting. Her mind was troubled with such torturing thoughts as

"The wise words of Shiva I've flouted," she says,
I have shown up to Rama my ignorant ways.
And now for my lord what reply can I find ?" ... §

* सुनहि सति तवनारि सुभाऊ, संसय अस न धरिअ उर काऊ।
† जौं तुम्हरें मन अति संदेहू, तौ किन जाइ परीछा लेहू।
‡ कहेउबहोरि कहाँ वृषकेतु, विपिन अकेलि फिरहु केहि हेतु।
§ मैं संकर कर कहा न माना, निज अज्ञानु राम पर आना।
जाइ उतरु अब देहौं काहा, उर अपजा अति दारुन दाहा।

Rama knew well the distress of her heart and he revealed to her his great glory. Sati saw strange visions as she sped onward. She saw Rama with Sita and Lakshmana ahead. While turning backward she saw them again. Where-ever she looked, there the same visions appeared before her. She saw Rama being gathered round and worshipped by all gods - Shivas, Bramas and Vishnus. She saw also three goddesses - herself, Sarasvati and Lakshmi there. While she saw the worshipping gods in varying forms, Rama was seen in one form only. Her heart trembled, she lost all consciousness, and she sank to the ground with eyes closed. When she came to senses, she opened her eyes and was surprised to see nothing of the vision. Then she went to where Shiva was waiting. As Sati came near the Lord, he smiled and asked her to tell how she tested the Lord (Rama). She said, "My dear Lord, I put no test to him, but, before him I simply, like you, bowed my head." Shiva understood Sati's falsehood. Since she had assumed the form of Sita, Lord Rama's consort, Shiva thought:

> "If I show her love now and take her as wife,
> I shall close up faith's road and do a wrong for the world". §

Thus thinking, he was suffering in his mind. Without uttering any word to Sati, Shiva made a great vow not to treat her as his wife henceforth. She besought him again and again to tell her his vow, he did not speak it to her and she guessed about it all herself. She knew that 'as she deceived him; now the fruit of her folly must fall on her' Knowing well her deep wrong, her heart was consumed by fierce fever. Shiva tried to console her by telling pleasant stories. When they came to Kailas, their mountain abode, Shiva seated himself beneath a tree in contemplation. Sati remained suffering in her mind while repenting for the wrong done by her. Thus severed from Shiva, she did not like to remain alive and so made a vow to quit her body She now prayed the Lord to devise a way soon "by which without pain I may die" to put an end to her unbearable distress. Thus Goddess Sati was extremely distressed. When Shiva's trance broke and he awoke, Sati

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§ सती कीन्ह सीता कर बेषा, सिव उर भएउ बिषाद बिसेषा।
जौं अब करौं सती सन प्रीती, मिटै भगति पथु होइ अनीती।

bowed before him with reverant humility.

Great Daksha (Sati's father) was reigning as king at that time. The king's heart was swollen with pride. He called all the priests and sages and made preparations for a great sacrifice and invited the gods with due honours. Except Vishnu, Brahma and Shiva all the gods went there in chariots with their wives. Sati saw them going through the skies. She was told that Daksha, her father, was holding a sacrifice and the gods were invited there. She thought, if her Lord would allow, she would spend a few days at her father's home on that occasion. She prayed the Lord to permit her to share in the great rejoicing.

Shiva said "that is good, I'd be greatly delighted,
But one thing forbids, you have not been invited;
King Daksha his doughters has called, they are expected;
But due to his quarrel with me, you're neglected...
Dear one, if without being called you should go,
All love and respect would be lost, that you know.
One goes, though not called,...to see
Relations and others who friendly may be,
But no good can come if you go to the place
Where waits for you enmity spite, and disgrace." *

Lord Shiva pleaded again and again not to go, but she would heed not a word. He finally said, "To go there unasked is to me wholly wrong." When Sati arrived at her father's home, none showed any courtesy to her from fear of king Daksha, except her own mother, who greeted her kindly. Her farher was enraged when he saw her come. Then Bhawani went to see the sacrifice, and there she saw nothing offered to Shiva. She called to her mind the words of her husband. Finding this insult to Lord Shiva, she burned within with anger and cried in wild wrath ;-

"O honoared ones gathered here, list to my word ;
This insult to Shiva you have uttered and heard ;
At once the dread fruits of this all will receive ;
And my father in bitter repentence will grieve ...

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* जो बिनु बोले जाहु भवानी, रहै न सीलु सनेहु न कानी।
जदपि मित्र प्रभु पितु गुरु गेहा, जाइअ बिनु बोलेहु न संदेहा।
तदपि विरोध मान जहं कोई, तहाँ गए कल्यान न होई।

The world's supreme spirit, great God, sin's foe ever,
The father of all and of all good the giver ;
From him my mad father withholds honour due ;
But having my birth from him, what can I do ?
I therefore will now from this body depart,
The moon-crested, bull-blazoned Lord in my heart." †

While she spoke this, the divine fire then burnt up her body before all. At her death Sati prayed Vishnu to grant her this boon that "she might love Shiva with each birth and breath." On hearing of Sati's death, Shiva's attendants, Virabhadra and others, came and destroyed the sacrifice. Many were killed including king Daksha whose head was cut off and thrown in the sacrificial fire

After her death, Sati was born as daughter of king Himalaya and thus she came to earth as Paravati. With the birth of Paravati, glory came to the hills of Himalaya. Then came there the sage Narada who was duly honoured and Paravati was brought before him. The saint foretold many good things about the girl who would be worshipped and honoured by the whole world.He spoke also a few ills about her. He said that she will be wedded to -

"A man with no beauty, no honour, no love,
One forsaking all ties and ascetic,
Hair matted, and naked, and hideously clad ;" §

The parents of the girl were distressed to hear this. The saint said, nobody is able to change any body's fate. He nevertheless, told them a plan by which Uma may be married with Lord Shiva, since all the ills of her destined bridegroom can be found in him (Shiva). Sati's marriage with Shiva would not be an easy thing since "Lord Shiva by nature is infinite power" (i.e. he is the supreme God). The saint

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† सुनहु सभासद सकल मुनिंदा। कही सुनी जिन संकर निंदा॥
सो फलु तुरत लहब सब काहूं। भली भांति पछिताब पिता हूँ॥
पिता मंद मति निंदत तेही। दच्छ सुक्र संभव येह देही॥
तजिहौं तुरत देह तेहि हेतू। उर धरि चन्द्रमौलि बृषकेतु

§ जोगी जटिल अकाम मन नगन अमंगल वेष।
अस स्वामी एहि कहं मिलिहि परी हस्त असि रेख॥

therefore suggested that this maid should undergo a strict penance to achieve Shiva as her husband, since none else can be found as her match.

The maid Paravati saw in a dream a handsome young Brahman who told her to begin her penance. She spoke this to her mother. Uma left her home and went away gladly to practise penance. Her father and mother and all near and dear ones were grief-stricken. Uma went off to the forest where she practised hard penance. She was indeed delicate for all such severity. She gave herself to fasting and prayer and meditation. For a number of years she lived on roots and fruits only. For some time she ate nothing but plants. On some days she lived on but water and air. For some time she ate the bel-tree leaves. Seated between five fires, she performed severe austerity and meditation. Seeing her body emaciated, the Lord Brahma came and said to her to give up her sufferings as she would attain her desire soon. He advised her to return home when her father would come to call her. Then Lord Rama came to Shiva and told to him Paravati's full story, her birth, her glory, her penance and her love. Rama requested him -

"O Shiva, if true is the love you declare
For me, hear and heed my behest,
At once make this dear mountain maiden your wife,
Go now and fulfill my request." †

Shiva was pleased to obey the command of Shree Rama. The seven saints came to see Shiva just then. He said to them to go to Paravati and test her love and then to send her father to bring her again to his home.

At that time there arose a demon named Taraka who subjected all the worlds and their rulers and robbed the gods. The gods came to Brahma for the destruction of this demon. He was destined to meet his last end at the hands of Shiva's own son. The gods told their troubles to Mara (cupid) and requested him to prevail upon Shiva to marry. He agreed to help them. He advanced

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† अब बिनती मम सुनहु सिव जौं मोपर निज नेहु।
जाय बिबाहहु सैलजहि यह मोहि माँगे देहु ॥

towards Shiva with all his forces of Passion.

"Despite his devices and strategems, Kama
And all his great host were defeated;
Unawakened was Shiva, unbroken his vigil;
And thus was the Love-god's rage heated," *

Kama then climbed a mango tree. He shot five arrows which pierced Shiva's heart. Shiva's anger was roused from which the three worlds shook.

"His third eye he opened, whose ray deadly flashes;
It lighted on Kama, reduced him to ashes." †

All gods including Brahma and Vishnu then approached Shiva and expressed their desire to see him wedded soon. They prayed him to accept Paravati as his wife who had suffered unlimited penance. With joy Shiva answered them, "Thus shall it be."

The gods started preparations for the marriage procession. They brought their heavenly chariots out and adorned them. The heavenly damsels (nymphs) danced and sang in elation. Lord Shiva was dressed and adorned by his servants-

"His crown matted locks and a snake his groom's crest;
As ear-rings and armlets, snakes; ash too applied
Ov'r his body; around him a lion-skin tied;
The moon on his brow, Ganges fair on his head;
Three eyes; and a snake for a God's sacred thread,
His throat marked with poison; a garland of skulls;
His goodness all dread of such vile dress annuls.
His trident and drum in hand, he rode splendid
His bull, while in music sweet instruments blended.' §

* सकल कला करि कोटि विधि हारेउ सेन समेत।
चली न अचल समाधि सिव कोपेउ हृदयनिकेत॥

† तब सिव तीसर नयन उघारा, चितवत कामु भएउ जरि छारा।

§ सिवहि संभुगन करहिं सिंगारा। जटा मुकुट अहि मौरु संवारा॥
कुंडल कंकन पहिरे ब्याला। तन बिभूति पट केहरि छाला॥
ससिललाट सुंदर सिर गंगा। नयन तीनि उपबीत भुजंगा॥
गरल कंठ उर नर सिर माला। असिव बेष सिवधाम कृपाला॥
कर त्रिसूल अरु डमरु बिराजा। चले बसहं चढ़ि बाजहिं बाजा।

Then all gods including Vishnu and Brahma joined the procession in their carriages. 'Such splendour was never seen before, nor again'. A train of Shiva's servants also joined the procession ; at the command of Shiva they all came.

"Some had great monstrous heads, others not any;
Some had no hands or feet ; others had many ;
Some had great eyes, some no eyes, or eyes sunken;
Some big and bloated, some shrivelled and shrunken..." †

When the procession arrived, the city became more brilliant and excited. The people said -

"That is no wedding train, but an army of hell ;
The bridegroom, a madman, a huge bull bestrides;" ¶

The women were greatly distressed. The queen was in grief; she wept and lamented. She blamed Narada for giving such 'silly' instructions to Uma. Bhawani felt keenly her mother's deep grief. She comforted her with her words. She said -

"If it is my fate that a madman I marry,
Why should another the blame for this carry ?" *

Now, just at that time, along with the seven sages saint Narada arrived on the scene. He told them the whole story, that the Lord Shiva (Shankara) and Uma are eternally united in wedlock.

"As it was always, so here, she to Shanker is dear." ‡

The doubting and grieving of the king and queen ceasad and throughout the whole city at once spread the news of the marriage of the Supreme God Shankar and His eternal Consort Uma (Paravati). The king and queen joyfully and with reverance again and again fell at Paravati's feet. The

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† कोउ मुखहीन विपुलमुख काहू, बिनु पद कर कोउ बहु पद बाहू ।
विपुल नयन कोउ नयन विहीना, रिष्ट पुष्ट कोउ अति तन खीना ।

¶ कहिअ काह कहि जाइ न बाता, जमकर धार किधौं बरिआता ।
बरु बौराह बरद असवारा, ब्याल कपाल विभूषण छारा ।

* करम लिखा जौं बाउर नाहू, तौ कत दोसु लगाइअ काहू ।

‡ ......गिरजा सर्वदा संकर प्रिया ।

marriage ceremony was held with great rejoicing throughout the whole country. When the bride (Paravati) and bridegroom (Shiva) were united, the gods in their hearts were all thrilled and delighted. After their marriage, the divine couple went to their heavenly abode, mount Kailasa, where their son, the six-headed one (Kumara), was born. When he grew up, he fought against the demon Taraka who was defeated and killed. Thus peace was established in heaven and earth.

There is a deep meaning in this wonderful and exciting description of the Supreme Lord's marriage with His Shakti, which the writer leaves to the learned readers to think themselves. We would only pray that our divine Mother and Father, Paravati and Parameshvara (Shiva) may confer their choicest blessings on us all on this auspicious Shiva Ratri Day. May those who worship Shankara and Paravati with faith, devotion and sincerety be ever happy and prosperous.

**Greetings to you all.**


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